



The United States Agency for International Development

USAID - COLOMBIA:

Support to Democratic Institutions

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Violence and narcotrafficking, compounded by the unfinished reforms of the 1991 constitution, are eroding the institutions that underpin Colombian democracy. USAID's goal is to promote responsive, participative, and accountable public institutions, particularly in the judiciary, municipal governments, and agencies that deal with human rights. USAID's contribution to the five-year Colombian program of strengthening democratic institutions is estimated at \$144 million, of which, \$57 million was provided in FY 1999-2000. Viable democratic institutions underlie the success of Colombia's search for peace and its fight to control narcotics production and trafficking.

Judicial Sector Reform

- ▶ Oral, accusatorial trials increase access to justice, promote human rights and provide transparency to counter corruption. The Superior Judicial Council, the Prosecutor General's Office, Public Defender's Office, and Attorney General's Office have jointly agreed on a transition to oral trial procedure. USAID is promoting the transition by creating appropriate hearing rooms, training key actors in oral accusatorial procedure, and providing technical assistance and other support. Two courts are now hearing cases in Cali and Cartagena; oral courts are expected to open in Medellin and Pereira in April 2001; eight other courts are expected during 2001.
- ▶ To bring justice into the reach of the rural and urban poor, USAID supports one-stop legal offices called Casas de Justicia (Justice Houses). The Casas de Justicia offer formal and informal conflict resolution mechanisms and a variety of social and legal services. Each of the 15 Casas handles over 150 cases daily, avoiding lengthy formal judicial resolution. Casas are operating in Bogota (2), Cali (2), Bucaramanga, Chigorodo (Uraba), Ibague, Neiva, Pereira, Valledupar, Cartagena, Barranquilla, Mocoa, Pasto, and Popayan. Casas will open soon in Riohacha, Medellin, and San Andres. Others are planned for Armenia, Quibdo, Leticia, Barrancabermeja and other cities yet to be chosen.

- ▶ Additional public defenders will be trained and placed in priority areas, such as Putumayo, Cucuta, Villavicencio, Riohacha, Tunja, and Ibague. Increased numbers of trained public defenders will improve legal representation and enhance human rights observance for poor defendants.
- ▶ Criminal code reform will be paired with a public education program to ensure due process and transparency, and to gain public trust and confidence in the criminal justice system. USAID works with the Superior Judicial Council and the Ministry of Justice to promote needed policy reforms, informed public debate, and to increase public trust.

Local Government

- ▶ Building on alternative development and civil society programs, local government assistance will enable municipalities to improve efficiency and accountability and increase citizen oversight. USAID-funded municipal strengthening provides a model for the development of consensus between national and local governments and citizens.
- ▶ USAID officials met with the governor, his staff, and the 13 mayors of Putumayo in December, February, and March to discuss transparent financial management, municipal development plans, and the GOC's development strategy and plans for Putumayo. Based on the municipal plans, USAID-funded small infrastructure projects in the municipalities are expected to begin in April.
- ▶ In February, officials from the GOC and USAID met with the governor of Caqueta, his staff, and 15 of the 16 mayors to discuss transparent financial management and ways to gain greater public participation in the approval of municipal development plans.

Human Rights

- ▶ USAID works with the Ministry of the Interior, Attorney General's Office, national and municipal Ombudsmen, the human rights unit of the Prosecutor General, and other Colombian government agencies on human rights abuse detection and prevention, protection of human rights workers, and the provision of effective responses to violations. USAID and the National Ombudsman have developed an early warning system as a means of preventing massacres by paramilitary forces and guerrillas. Consultations are in progress to implement the system in 35 regional Ombudsman's offices. The general outline of the early warning system has been accepted by the Inspector General of the Colombian Armed Forces.
- ▶ USAID assists the mixed Ministry of Interior-NGO committee for protection of NGO human rights workers, journalists, and labor leaders. Radios, bulletproof vests and other commodities as well as security remodeling of offices for NGOs and union leaders are being purchased by USAID and the Ministry of Interior.
- ▶ USAID funds four Colombian human rights NGOs, totaling \$415,000, in areas where paramilitaries and guerrillas are active. In Santander, an NGO works for prevention of violence; in Magdalena Medio, an NGO operates a human rights network and conflict mediation; in Valle de Cauca, an NGO promotes protection for Afro-Colombians; and a national NGO assists victims of kidnapping.
- ▶ USAID is helping Colombian government agencies and civil society organizations working for the protection of human rights to make citizens aware of their rights, document human rights violations, and improve systems that track abuses and monitor investigations and prosecutions.

Anti-corruption

- ▶ The anti-corruption program will strengthen Colombian municipal financial controls and increase citizen oversight of public resources. A diagnostic of the current extent of corruption and policy and procedural recommendations have been presented to the national advisory commission on internal controls.
- ▶ The program will establish international control standards and procedures, train audit staff, and assist adoption of modern audit techniques within municipalities.

- ▶ USAID is assisting NGOs and GOC officials to attend a March 22 meeting sponsored by the World Bank to layout a national agenda for anti-corruption activities. NGOs will also receive funding to organize awareness campaigns and support citizen oversight committees.

Conflict Management and Peace Process

- ▶ USAID assists the government of Colombia to evaluate its negotiation strategies and to refine approaches to social and economic issues that surround the negotiations with the FARC and ELN.
- ▶ Assistance also will be provided to community-based projects managed by NGOs, universities and other civil society groups to gather data to conduct studies, facilitate forums for dialogue, and inform the discussion of issues. Four grants have been awarded to date.